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THE CLOSING SCENE

BY THOMAS BUCHANAN READ

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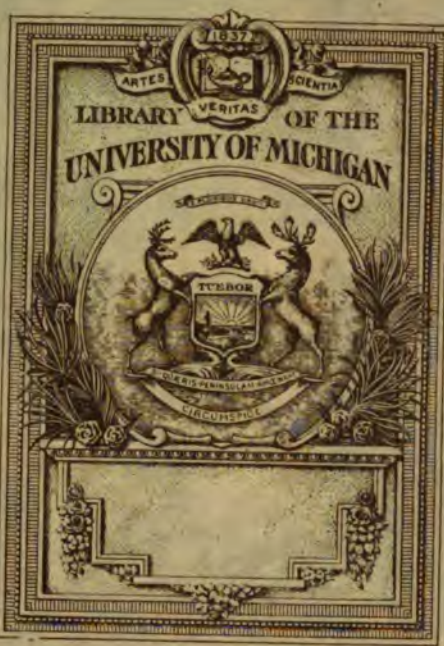

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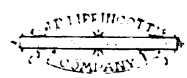

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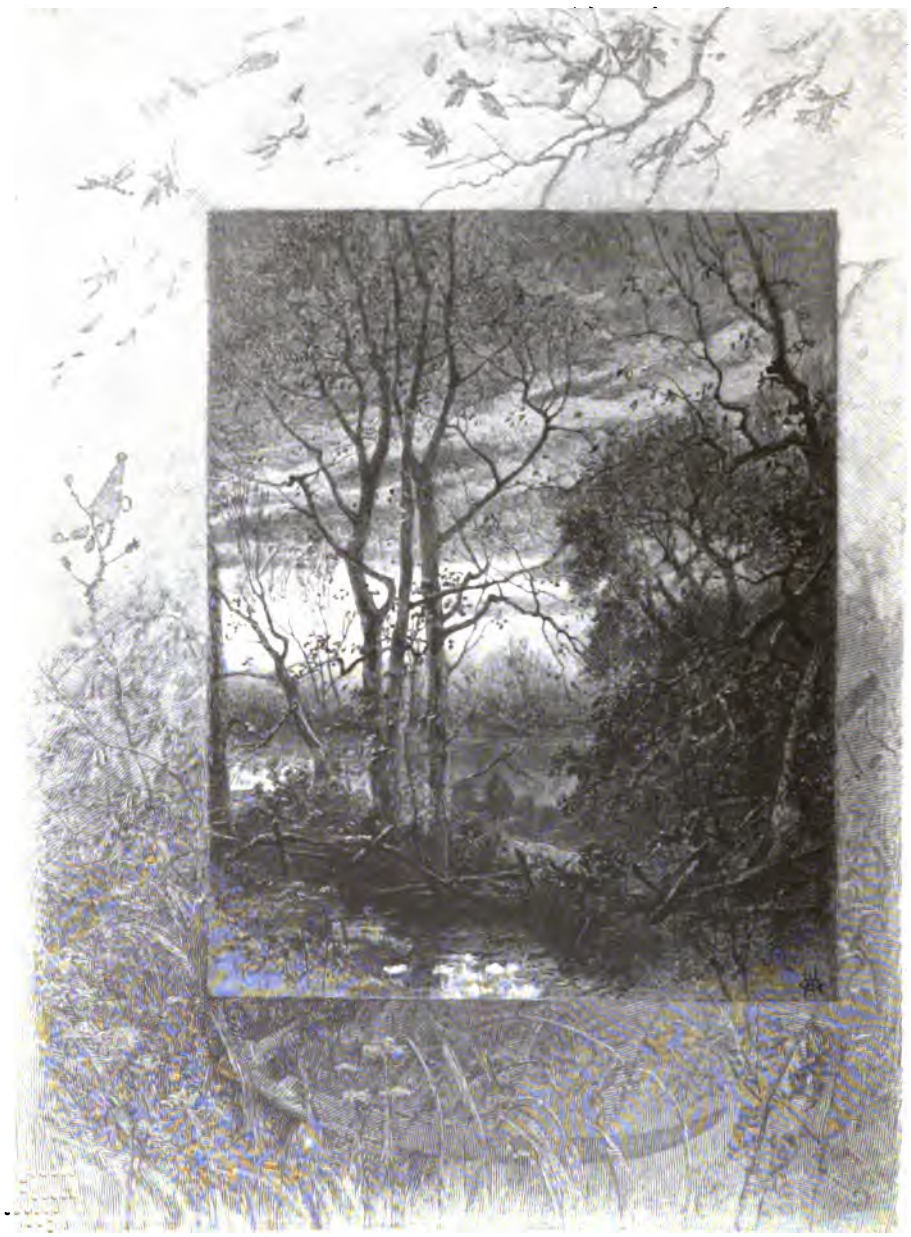

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WHERE SANG THE NOISY MASONS OF THE EAVES 25

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ALL NOW WAS SONGLESS, EMPTY, AND FORLORN 27

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ALONE FROM OUT THE STUBBLE PIPED THE QUAIL . . . . . PAGE 29
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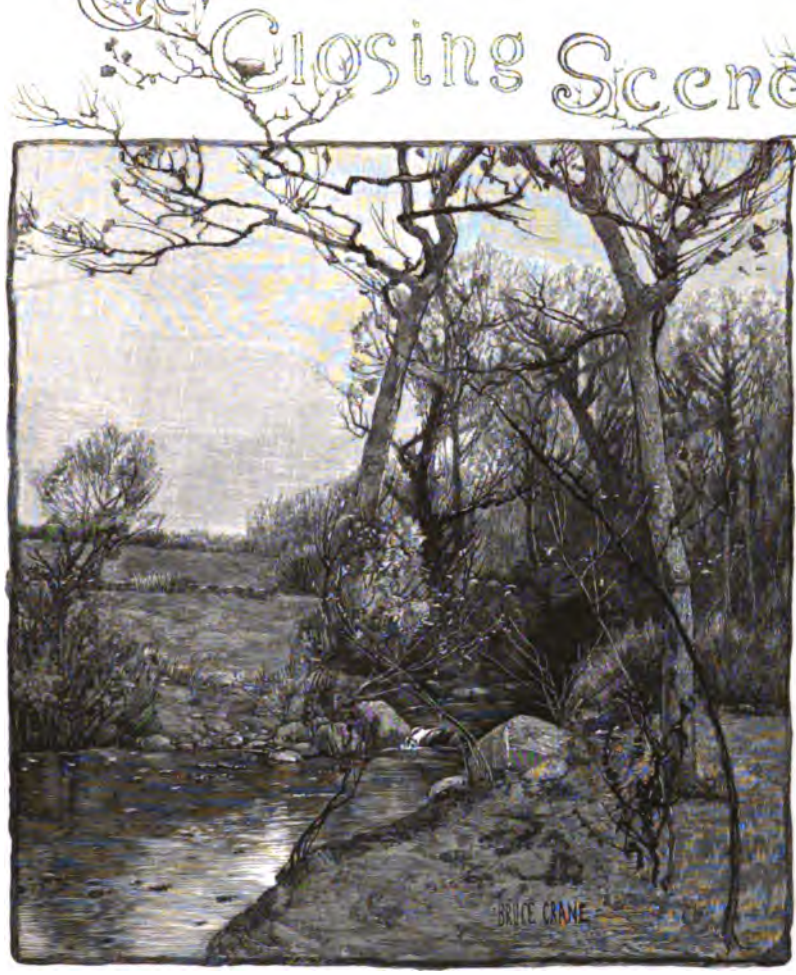
The Closing Scene



WITHIN his sober realm of leafless trees
The russet year inhaled the dreamy air;
Like some tanned reaper in his hour of ease,
When all the fields are lying brown and bare.

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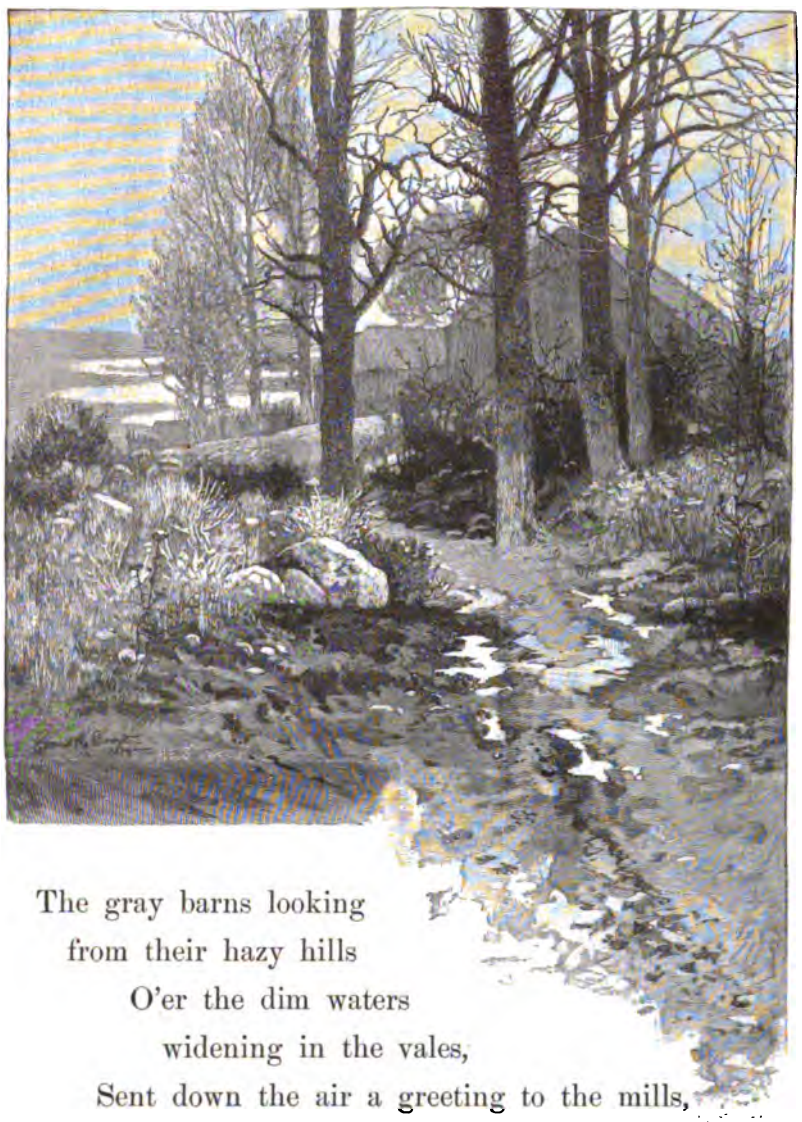

The gray barns looking
from their hazy hills
O'er the dim waters
widening in the vales,
Sent down the air a greeting to the mills,
On the dull thunder of alternate flails.

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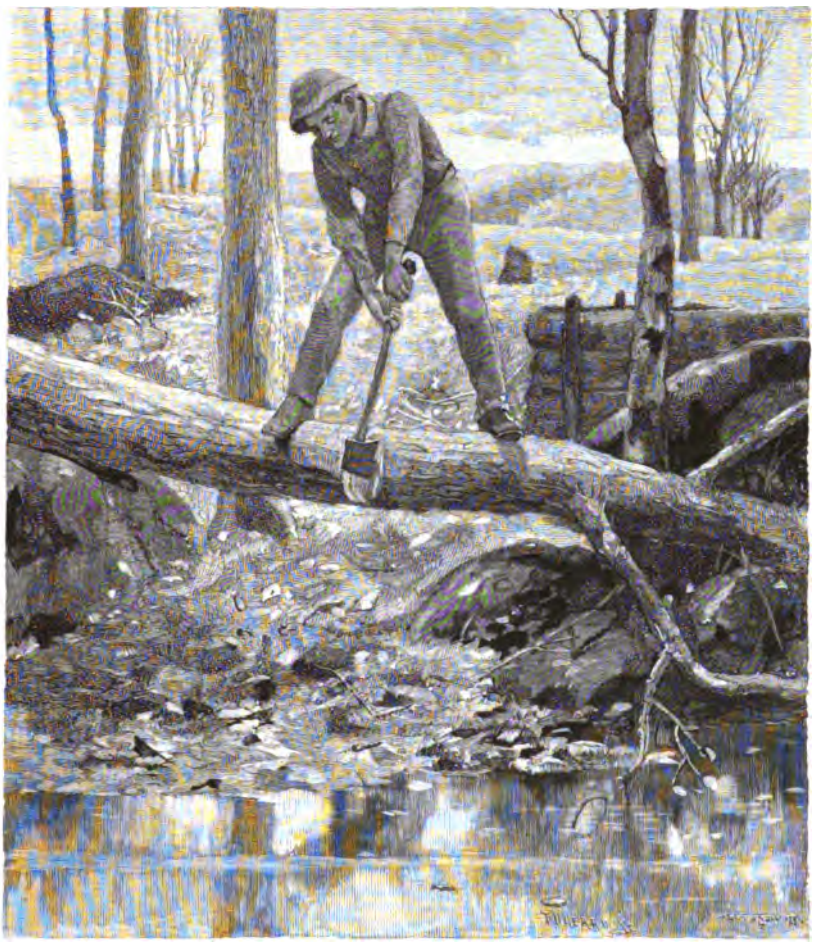

All sights were mellowed, and all sounds subdued,
The hills seemed farther, and the streams sang low,
As in a dream the distant woodman hewed
His winter log with many a muffled blow.

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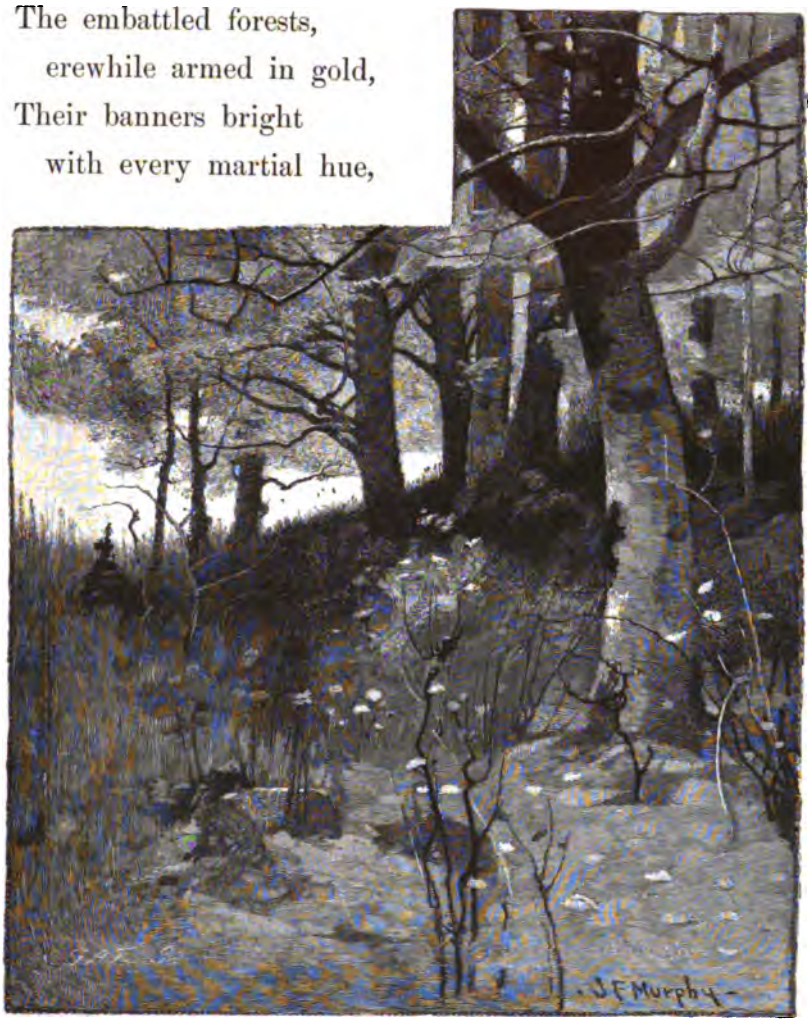
The embattled forests,
erewhile armed in gold,
Their banners bright
with every martial hue,



Now stood, like some sad beaten host of old,
Withdrawn afar in Time's remotest blue.

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On slumbrous wings the vulture held his flight;
The dove scarce heard his sighing mate's complaint;
And like a star slow drowning in the light,
The village church vane seemed to pale and faint.

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The sentinel cock upon the hill-side crew—
Crew thrice, and all was stiller than before,—

Silent till some
replying warder blew
His alien horn, and then was heard no more.

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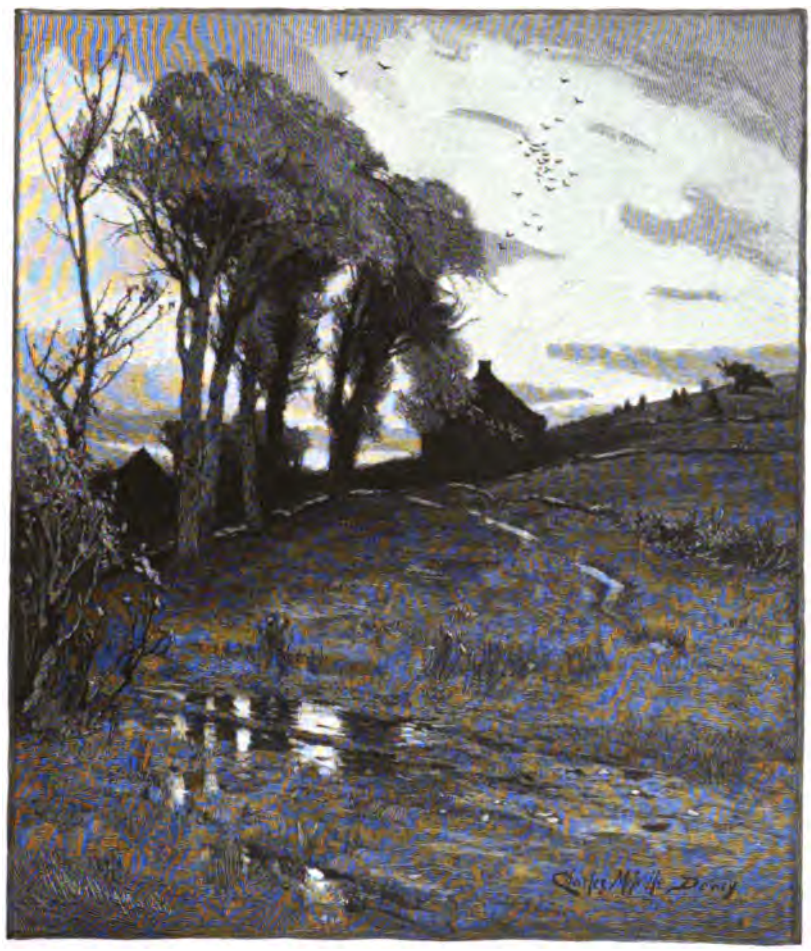

Where erst the jay, within the elm's tall crest,
Made garrulous trouble round her unfledged young,
And where the oriole hung her swaying nest,
By every light wind like a censer swung:—

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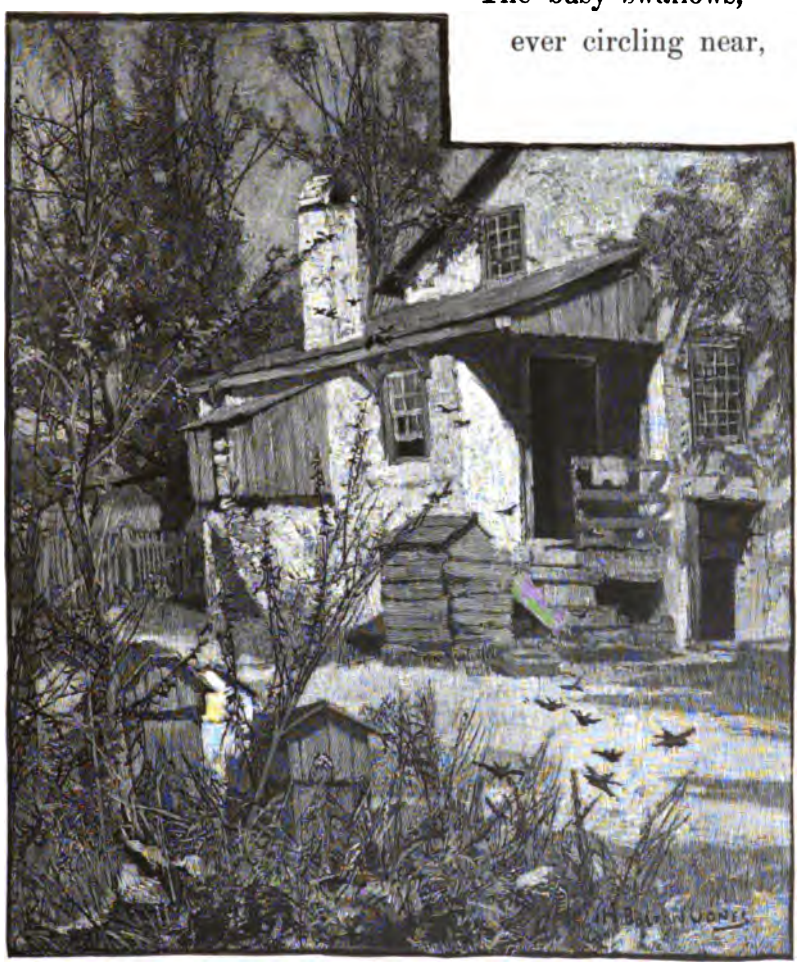
Where sang the noisy masons of the eaves,
The busy swallows, ever circling near,



Foreboding, as the rustic mind believes,
An early harvest and a plenteous year;—

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Where every bird which charmed the vernal feast,
Shook the sweet slumber from its wings at morn,
To warn the reaper of the rosy east,—

All now was songless, empty, and forlorn.

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Alone from out the stubble piped the quail,
And croaked the crow through all the dreamy gloom;

Alone the pheasant, drumming in the vale,
Made echo to the distant cottage loom.

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There was no bud, no bloom upon the bowers;
The spiders wove their thin shrouds night by night;
The thistle-down, the only ghost of flowers,
Sailed slowly by, passed noiseless out of sight.

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Amid all this, in this most cheerless air,
And where the woodbine shed upon the porch

Its crimson leaves, as if the Year stood there
Firing the floor with his inverted torch;—

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Amid all this, the centre of the scene,
The white-haired matron, with monotonous tread,
Plied the swift wheel, and, with her joyless mien,
Sat, like a Fate, and watched the flying thread.

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She had known Sorrow,—he had walked with her,
Oft supped and broke the bitter ashen crust;

And in the dead leaves still she heard the stir
Of his black mantle trailing in the dust.

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While yet her cheek was bright with summer bloom,
Her country summoned, and she gave her all;
And twice War bowed to her his sable plume—
Regave the swords to rust upon her wall.

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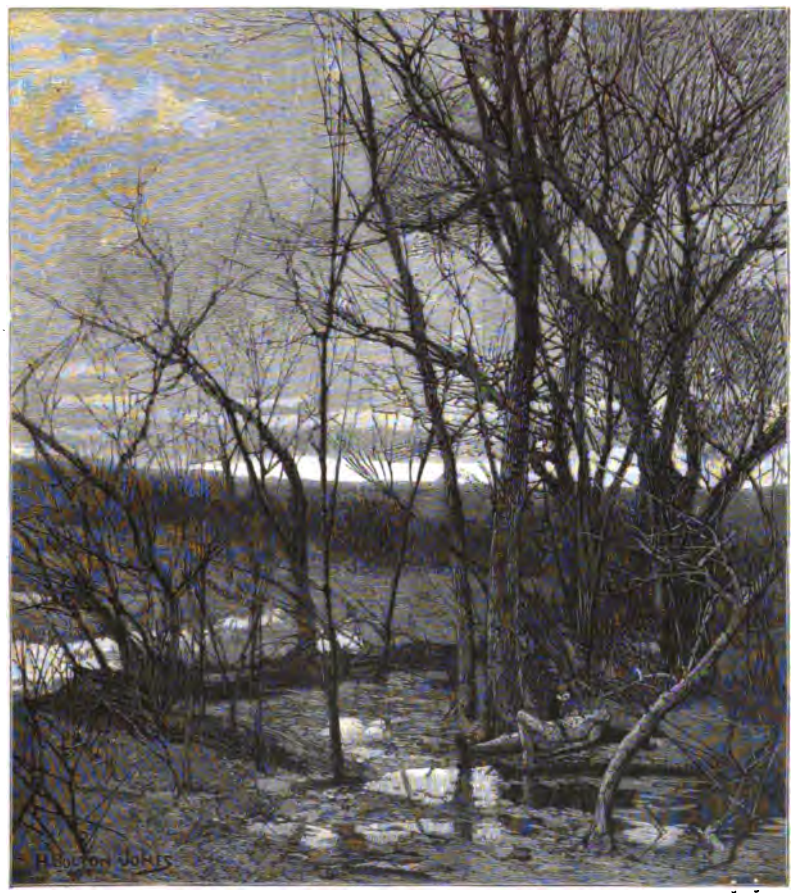
Regave the swords,—but not the hand that drew
And struck for Liberty its dying blow,



Nor him who, to his sire and country true,
Fell 'mid the ranks of the invading foe.

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Long, but not loud, the droning wheel went on,
  Like the low murmur of a hive at noon;
Long, but not loud, the memory of the gone
  Breathed through her lips a sad and tremulous tune.

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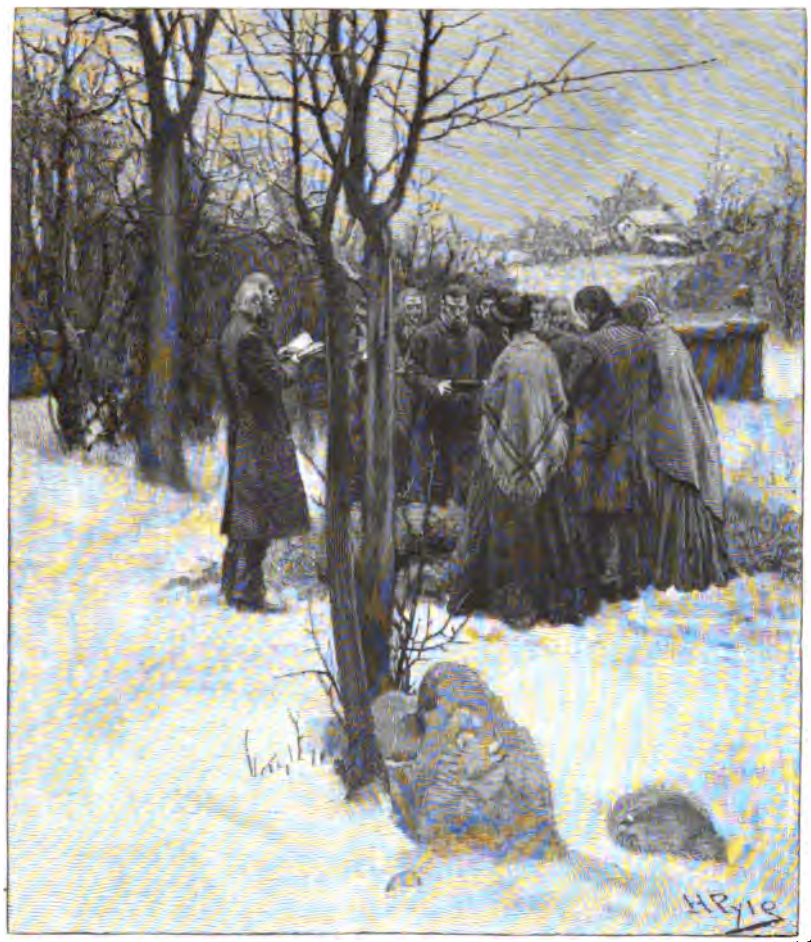
At last the thread was snapped—her head was bowed;
Life dropped the distaff through his hands serene,—



And loving neighbors smoothed her careful shroud,
While Death and Winter closed the autumn scene.

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